

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7999

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: FIRST REACTIONS TO WITHDRAWAL OF CABINET RESIGNATION

REF: BEIRUT 2720

1. SUMMARY. THERE IS A CERTAIN AIR OF RELIEF IN BEIRUT THAT THE CABINET CRISIS HAS COME TO AN END, BUT WITHOUT ANY NOTABLE CRIES OF ENTHUSIASM. A NUMBER OF LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED APPROVAL OF PRESIDENT SARKIS' DECISION TO RE-INSTATE THE EXISTING EIGHT-MEMBER HOSS GOVERNMENT. THE LEFT IS HIGHLY CRITICAL, AND A NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE DISTINCTLY UNENTHUSIASTIC. END SUMMARY.

2. LEADERS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED APPROVAL OF REINSTATEMENT OF THE EARLIER CABINET INCLUDE CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PIERRE
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GEMAYEL, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE KAMAL ASSAD, AND FORMER PRESIDENT CHARLES HELOU. CHAMOUN TOOK THE POSITION THAT "THERE IS NOTHING UNCONSTITUTIONAL, NOTHING THAT NEGATES THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, IN THE GOVERNMENT'S REMAINING IN OFFICE... IF THE GOVERNMENT REMAINS IN OFFICE, THERE IS NO CRISIS." PIERRE GEMAYEL TOOK THE POSITION THAT IT WAS BEST FOR THE OUTGOING GOVERNMENT TO

REMAIN IN OFFICE UNTIL THE WAY COULD PROPERLY BE PREPARED FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT. FORMER PRESIDENT CHARLES HELOU TOOK ISSUE WITH THE TERM "REFLOATING" (WHICH HAS BECOME THE PRINCIPAL JOURNALISTIC SHORTHAND FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE GOVERNMENT IN RECENT DAYS) SAYING, "THIS IMPLIES A DROWNING OR A BANKRUPTCY, AND THE IMPLICATION IS INACCURATE." CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL, AND HELOU ALL STRESSED THAT, TECHNICALLY, THE OLD GOVERNMENT WAS CONTINUING IN OFFICE RATHER THAN BEING REAPPOINTED. HOUSE SPEAKER KAMAL ASSAD SAID THE RESINSTATEMENT WAS "THE LESSER EVIL. . . IT WOULD BE BETTER TO FORM A GOVERNMENT OF POLITICIANS, BUT SINCE THIS HAS PROVEN IMPOSSIBLE, AND SINCE THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN RETAINING THIS GOVERNMENT TEMPORARILY OR REPLACING IT WITH A SIMILAR GOVERNMENT, IT IS BETTER FOR THIS GOVERNMENT TO STAY IN OFFICE."

3. INDIGNATION ON THE LEFT. LEFTIST NATIONAL MOVEMENT ISSUED A STATEMENT CHARGING THAT THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS THE RESULT OF PRESSURES EXERTED BY THE RIGHTIST LEBANESE FRONT. THE STATEMENT ACCUSED THE FRONT OF "WORKING OPENLY AND SECRETLY TO PREVENT A RETURN TO ACCORD AMONG THE LEBANESE PEOPLE IN AN EFFORT TO IMPLEMENT THE INTERNATIONALIZATION AND PARTITION CONSPIRACY AND ROB LEBANON OF ARABNESS." SIMILARLY, THE PRO-SYRIAN "NATIONAL FRONT" ISSUED A STATEMENT WHICH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"CATEGORICALLY" REJECTED REINSTATEMENT. "THE REFLOATING OF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD MEAN THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE SUBMITTED TO POLITICAL BLACKMAIL... WE WONDER WHY ALL THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIONS WERE UNDERTAKEN IF IT WAS ALL TO LEAD TO A COMMITMENT TO THE ABNORMAL CHAMOUNIST POSITION." A THIRD STATEMENT ISSUED BY KAMAL SHATILA'S "UNION OF WORKING PEOPLE'S FORCES" MADE THE ACCUSATION THAT, "BY SUBMITTING TO THE CHAMOUNIST CONDITIONS, DR. HOSS HAS DEALT A DIRECT BLOW TO THE POPULAR NATIONALIST LINE. . . HE HAS SUBMITTED TO THE GOALS OF ISRAELI AGGRESSION IN LEBANON, WHICH IS AIMED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, AT BLOCKING THE FORMATION OF A POPULAR, NATIONALIST CABINET WHICH CAN ACHIEVE POLITICAL JUSTICE AND AVERT THE DANGERS OF PARTITION." EVEN BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT, MOURABITOUN LEADER SAMIR SABBAGH HAD TOLD EMBOFF THAT REAPPOINTMENT OF A TECHNOCRATIC GOVERNMENT WOULD BE A GRAVE SETBACK FOR THE COUNTRY.

4. PARLIAMENTARIANS IRKED. MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, WHO STOOD TO LOSE MOST IN PERSONAL WAYS FROM A RETURN TO THE "TECHNOCRAT" RATHER THAN A PARLIAMENTARY FORMULA, ARE PREDICTABLY DISDAINFUL. DEPUTY MAJID ARSLAN: "I DON'T

UNDERSTAND THIS REFLOATING NOTION. THEY MUST SUBMIT TO THE VIEWS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. PARLIAMENT IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PEOPLE, WHETHER THEY LIKE IT OR NOT. WE WANT AN ALL MP GOVERNMENT. . . WHAT IS AN MP? IS HE A PLUMBER?" DEPUTY MOUNIR ABUFADAL: "ANY EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY CABINET IS AN ATTACK ON PARLIAMENT.

5. PRESS REACTION. FRENCH LANGUAGE DAILY L'ORIENT-LE JOUR MAY 16 CARRIES HEADLINE: "REFLOATING, A LESSER EVIL WHILE AWAITING A CABINET OF UNION." EDITORIAL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY IKE COMMENTS THAT FAILURE TO FORM A NEW CABINET SHOWS THAT LEBANON IS NO MORE UNITED THAN IT WAS TWO YEARS EARLIER, BUT THAT AT THE SAME TIME THE COUNTRY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IS "NO LONGER UNDER THE THUMB OF THE POLITICAL TITANS WHO HAVE RULED IT SINCE 1943." AT THE SAME TIME, IKE EDITORIALIZED, NEW POLITICAL FORCES HAVE NOT YET CLEARLY EMERGED. TAKING AS OPTIMISTIC A VIEW AS POSSIBLE, IKE CLAIMED THAT THE CABINET RESIGNATION AND WITHDRAWAL EPISODE, "HAS SHOWN LEBANON'S POLITICAL BICKERERS THAT THE HOSS GOVERNMENT'S INABILITY TO MOVE TOWARD NATIONAL ACCORD IN ITS 1977-78 TERM IN OFFICE WAS DUE NOT TO ITS INCOMPETENCE BUT TO THEIR INTRANSIGENCE. THIS SHOULD ALLOW THE NEW HOSS GOVERNMENT TO WORK IN A FAIRLY CRITICISM-FREE ATMOSPHERE AND RENDER THE VARIOUS PARTIES MORE RECEPTIVE TO ITS APPROACHES. . . IT MAY FACILITATE THE HOSS GOVERNMENT'S NEXT ATTEMPT AT NATIONAL UNITY."

6. ARABIC PRESS GENERALLY TAKES DEFENSIVELY LAUDATORY ATTITUDE. MICHEL ABU JAOUDEH, EDITOR OF AN NAHAR, PRAISES THE SOLIDARITY BETWEEN PRESIDENT SARKIS AND PRIME MINISTER HOSS, AND COMPARES IT TO THE QUARRELS BETWEEN PRESIDENT HELOU AND PRIME MINISTER KARAME IN 1969 OR BETWEEN PRESIDENT FRANJIYAH AND KARAME IN 1976. ABU JAOUDEH WRITES THAT, "THE CABINET RESIGNED IN ORDER TO NOT EXPLODE. IT IS NOW BEING REFLOATED IN ORDER TO NOT EXPLODE AS WELL. . . STAGING THE RESIGNATION WAS A CLEVER ACT; THE REFLOATING WAS CLEVER TOO." SAA'AB WRITES THAT THE ONLY REAL SOLUTION TO THE PRESENT POLITICAL CRISIS IN LEBANON IS A "MIDDLE SOLUTION", THAT IS, THE PRESENT CABINET. ANWAR AND ASH-SHARQ BOTH MAKE THE POINT THAT REVIVAL OF THE OUTGOING CABINET WAS THE ONLY POSSIBILITY, GIVEN THE VERY REAL AND DEEP POLITICAL DIVISIONS IN THE COUNTRY.

7. COMMENT: A NUMBER OF POLITICAL FIGURES ARE COMMENTING PRIVATELY THAT THE BIG WINNER IN THE EPISODE IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAMILLE CHAMOUN, THE BIG LOSER ELIAS SARKIS. AT FIRST
GLANCE, WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE. END COMMENT

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